

APHIS DIRECTIVE 417.7
7/9/84

FOREIGN SERVICE EXAMINING AND SELECTION

I. PURPOSE

This Directive states policies and procedures for the examining and selection of applicants for career candidate appointments in the APHIS Foreign Service.

II. POLICY

- A. It is APHIS policy to attract the best qualified applicants for Foreign Service positions. APHIS encourages eligible personnel of proven ability from within APHIS; qualified applicants from other USDA agencies; and applicants from other agencies of the Federal Government and the public and private sector who meet the statutory and eligibility requirements of the position.
- B. Applicants are considered without regard to race, color, creed, marital status, sex, age, physical handicap, or political affiliation.
- C. APHIS uses Foreign Service specialty review panels to evaluate applicants for staffing needs abroad. The review panels evaluate and identify candidates for management's consideration for assignment in the APHIS Foreign Service.

III. ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- A. Qualifications: Applicants must meet the basic qualification requirements of the occupational specialty as prescribed in OPM Handbook X-118. Any exception to this requirement must be approved by the Director, Human Resources Division (HRD).
- B. Age: Applicants must be no more than 59 years of age on the date of their career candidate appointment.
- C. Status: Applicants must have Career or Career-Conditional status.

IV. APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Applicants must submit the following in response to APHIS Recruitment Announcements:

- A. SF-171, Personal Qualifications Statement.
- B. OPM-1386, Background Survey Questionnaire (used for EEO statistics).
- C. Supplemental narrative describing the degree to which specific selection criteria are met and highlighting skills which would contribute to a successful career in the Foreign Service.
- D. Statement of availability for world wide assignments.

V. QUALIFYING GUIDELINES

- A. General. A standardized rating scale (See Attachment 2, page 2) will be used for evaluating an applicant's technical knowledges, skills, and abilities; suitability for the work; communications; and managerial competence (if required by position).
- B. Numerical Rating. A 100-point scale (maximum) will be used for

rating applicants.

- * Below 50 points: Unacceptable
- * Above 50 points: names of candidates will be placed on a roster of eligibles (subject to medical and security clearances)

VI. REVIEW PANEL MEMBERSHIP

Review panel membership will consist of:

- A. A minimum of 3 members including at least:
 - 1. One job specialty expert,
 - 2. One Foreign Service employee (APHIS),
 - 3. One Deputy Examiner (APHIS) certified by the Department of State Board of Examiners, and,
 - 4. If possible, a minority and/or woman representative.
- B. Review panel members will:
 - 1. Be designated by the Director/HRD in coordination with management officials as delegated by the Administrator,
 - 2. Serve a minimum of 18 months,
 - 3. Be at a class or grade equal to or higher than the highest class applicant, and
 - 4. Identify candidates for consideration for Foreign Service appointment in classes FP-2 through FP-7 by occupational categories.

VII. RECRUITMENT, EXAMINING, AND SELECTION PROCEDURES

- A. International Programs Management Liaison Staff (IPMLS) will:
 - 1. Coordinate with review panel to determine and develop the specific technical criteria to be evaluated during the examining process (see Attachment 1).
 - 2. Prepare APHIS recruitment Announcements and/or
 - 3. Arrange for external recruitment publicity.
 - 4. Review applications to determine if applicants meet basic eligibility requirements.
 - 5. Refer to the appropriate review panel names of applicants who are basically qualified.
 - 6. Maintain rosters of highly qualified candidates for 18 months.
 - 7. Inform candidates of tentative selection by telephone.
 - 8. Confirm selection in writing.
 - 9. Provide selected candidates with information on predeparture clearances and the proposed foreign assignment.

B. Review Panel will:

1. Determine and develop, in coordination with IPMLS, the technical criteria to be evaluated (See Attachment 1).
2. Assess qualified applicants' managerial experience, technical skills, suitability, and language proficiency relative to the needs of the APHIS Foreign Service (see Attachment 2).

C. Roster of Eligibles.

1. Candidates rated by the review panel will be placed on a roster of eligibles according to score, grouped within a 10-point range, (or a smaller point range for a large number of candidates).
2. Candidates within the highest point range group will be referred to the selecting official, upon request.
3. Rosters will be maintained by IPMLS and will be valid for 18 months; applicants not selected from roster during that period will be dropped.
4. Applicants' names may be kept more than 18 months if in the interest of the APHIS Foreign Service. This action requires approval from the Director, HRD.

D. Interviews.

1. These must be structured and standardized to ensure uniformity of interviews by selecting official.
2. If one candidate within the same point range is interviewed, than all candidates within the same range must be interviewed.

E. Final Selection.

1. Selection may be made from among any of the eligibles within the same point range.
2. If selection is not made from applicants in higher point range, justification based on valid job-related reasons must be documented.

VIII. APPOINTMENT AS A CAREER CANDIDATE

- A. A career candidate will be given a Foreign Service limited appointment (not to exceed 4 years). These appointments may be extended for 1 year, but must be terminated at the end of the fifth year. The purpose of the career candidate appointment is to permit on-the-job evaluation of a candidate's performance, capability, and adjustment in the Foreign Service.
- B. After serving 3 years in the Foreign Service, career candidates are considered for career status by the Foreign Service Tenuring Board. A maximum of 2 years may be waived by the Tenuring Board if the candidate previously served on a foreign assignment in a Civil Service or Foreign Service appointment.
- C. An employee serving as a career candidate may be terminated at any time during the 4-year period for unsatisfactory service or for any other cause that benefits the Foreign Service. Candidates not

recommended for career status in the Foreign Service during the 5-year period or otherwise separated will be transferred to a Civil Service position in the United States. The grade and rate of pay will be no lower than what would have applied had they remained in the Civil Service. For a candidate who had previously held a merit pay position, the rate of pay calculation will be based on the average performance rating of the appropriate pay pools.

IX. LIMITED NONCAREER APPOINTMENTS

- A. Foreign Service limited noncareer appointments may be made for a period of 1 year. As the need dictates, a possible extension may be made without review by the appropriate Occupational Specialty Selection Panel in the following situations: (1) if a suitable roster of candidates is not available; (2) if no acceptable candidate is on the appropriate roster; (3) if the assignment is for a specific program or project limited in duration; or (4) if the employee is over 59 years of age.
- B. Civil Service employees receiving Foreign Service noncareer limited appointments will be placed in a class which equates to his or her current Civil Service grade and salary. Nonstatus employees may be appointed to any class for which they qualify, not to exceed the established class of the position.
- C. Individuals considered for limited noncareer appointments must meet the basic qualification requirements of the occupational specialty. They are subject to medical examination and full-field security clearance, but not the review panel screening process.
- D. Employees serving on limited noncareer appointments may be considered for career candidate status provided: (1) they have been recommended by the appropriate review panel, and (2) there are available Foreign Service positions within APHIS.

Signed by:

James O. Lee, Jr.

Attachment

Job Analysis Procedures Steps

Prior to beginning the actual examining process the occupational specialty panel meets to determine what the technical evaluation criteria will be. This part of the examining process entails a joint effort by the panel and by IPMLS. This effort involves the following:

- 1. A review of the official position description and any other available information to identify the major duties of the position.
- 2. Based on the determination of major duties, the panel identifies and lists the knowledges, skills, and abilities (KSAs) needed to perform the duties of the position.
- 3. Using the list of KSA's developed, the panel goes through the process of eliminating any duplication and any KSA's which may be inappropriate.
- 4. At this point, the panel considers and ranks the KSA's left on the list in order of importance to successful performance on the job. After ranking, an assessment is made on whether a KSA is

essential to acceptable performance in the position.

5. The panel considers and determines if the KSA is ratable based on a written record. The written record in this case may consist of an applicant's SF-171, Personal Qualification Statement; Performance Appraisal record; and optional addenda which may be added to an applicant's SF-171.
6. The next, and perhaps most important, step involves the panel determining if the KSA's distinguish among applicants. That is, will they provide a range of differences between minimally acceptable applicants and outstanding applicants? If the panel agrees that they do, the panel develops level definitions which can be used to illustrate possession and/or demonstration of each KSA at different levels.
7. Finally, all of the panel's activities up to this point are documented on APHIS Forms 66, 67 and 68. These serve as the written record for the panel and details the steps applied to develop criteria. Once established, the criteria remains in effect for the occupation until a substantive change has occurred in the position. When this happens, the process is repeated and new criteria developed.

Candidate Evaluation Steps

1. Upon receipt of an individual's application, an initial review is conducted by a Personnel Specialist. This review is to determine if the applicant meets basic eligibility (X-118, status, etc.) requirements. Ineligible applicants are eliminated from further consideration.
2. After completion of this step, the specialty panel is convened to evaluate all of the applicants. The Personnel Specialist serves as a resource person to the panel and provides instructions, where appropriate. The instruction, at a minimum, include:
 - Their responsibility to keep discussion of the panel confidential;
 - Their responsibility to consider only the information on the application by comparing it to the information in the announcement, position description, and rating plan;
 - How to use the rating plans to rate candidates.
3. Panel members will independently evaluate each applicant against each KSA level definition and assign the appropriate point level.
4. Panel members must resolve any discrepancies of more than one level point (5 vs 4, 4 vs 3) among scores assigned by raters to an applicant for each KSA. The Personnel Specialist will be present and will participate in resolving and recording the scores.
5. At the end of the evaluation, the Personnel Specialist will record the totals arrived at by the panel members for each evaluation criterion. The final rankings of applicants will be determined by total overall scores.
6. Candidates will be placed in point-ranged groupings, usually 10 point groupings, i.e., 90-100, 80-89, 70-79, etc. Where large numbers of candidates exist, 5 point groupings may be used.

Foreign Service Examination Criteria

(Example)

Technical (knowledge, skills, and abilities) Maximum of 50 points
Determined, initially, by specialty panel and Personnel Staffing Specialist
based on review of job description. Standardized and used for all future
evaluations of the occupational series.

- a. Knowledge of PPQ programs, thorough knowledge of quarantine regulations, investigation techniques, pesticide applications, etc.
- b. Ability to evaluate data and reports and provide information to high levels of management.
- c. Knowledge of survey techniques.
- d. Ability to gain cooperation, use persuasive tactics, etc.

II. Suitability Maximum 30 points

Determined, initially, by IPMLS based on job description and resource knowledge of environmental factors which present problems working abroad. Standardized and used as a factor in all future announcements for all occupations.

- a. Ability to live in a foreign country.
- b. Ability to work with foreign nationals and cooperate with in-country officials.

III. Communication Maximum 20 points

Determined, initially, by IPMLS based on job description and resource knowledge of environmental factors which present problems working abroad. Standardized and used as a factor in all future announcements for all occupations.

- a. Ability to communicate in foreign languages.
- b. Ability to communicate in writing and make oral presentations.

IV. Managerial (optional) Maximum 10 points
(If used, factor I reduced to 40)

DISTRIBUTION: F30, ALL EMPLOYEES

OPR: HRD